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An Exploratory Study of Organizational Alignment in U.S. Academic Libraries

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Abstract: One way for academic libraries to increase funding from universities is by demonstrating the value they create through organizational alignment. This exploratory study tests if organizational alignment is effective. To test the argument that organizational alignment benefits university libraries, we studied athletic departments and library expenditures at Southeastern Conference universities in the United States. We examined mission statements and found that library missions aligned more directly with universities, but libraries saw less growth in their funding. This finding calls into question when, and where, organizational alignment is a practical strategy for library managers to pursue. Because our study was exploratory, we conclude future research should compare libraries with other academic units to test organizational alignment in additional contexts.
Keywords: Organizational alignment; Mission statements; Library budgets; Higher education

1. Introduction

One way for academic libraries to increase funding from universities is by demonstrating the value they create though organizational alignment. This exploratory study tests if organizational alignment is effective. To explore the argument that organizational alignment benefits university libraries, we studied athletic departments and libraries at Southeastern Conference (SEC) member universities in the United States (U.S.). We studied athletic departments and libraries, because U.S. collegiate athletics raises substantial amounts of money for universities. However, questions exist if athletics are central to the mission(s) of universities and if they deserve the investment universities make in them. Comparing library and athletic department funding, and then

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examining how well each align with university mission statements, therefore, provides a novel way to test if organizational alignment is effective as a fundraising strategy.

In our study, during a first and exploratory phase, we analyzed library and athletic department spending. Our motivation was to explore financial tensions in higher education with a focus on libraries. High profile media coverage led us to question if university athletic spending comes at libraries' expense. In addition, the library literature argues that organizational alignment is an effective strategy libraries can use to garner funding (Franklin, 2009; 2012; Oakleaf, 2010). However, this argument seems questionable in light of the substantial funding that many athletic departments receive, despite their indirect contributions to the work of universities. Next, we analyzed mission statements to find if SEC libraries were in better alignment with universities than athletic departments and if alignment correlated with increased funding.

In our findings, we conclude that library mission statements aligned more closely with universities than athletic departments, but libraries received less investment. This finding calls into question when, and where, alignment is a practical strategy for library managers to pursue. Next, we present four explanations and argue that U.S. academic libraries should stay open to alternative revenue generating strategies. Future research should compare libraries to other academic units in order to test organizational alignment in additional contexts.

2. Literature Review

What is an *organization*? One common definition is organizations are "organized bod[ies] of people with a particular purpose" like teaching students or conducting research (Oxford, 2016, para. 1). Organizations provide a mechanism for people to coordinate work. In formal contexts, the standard way to create an organization is to arrange individuals using hierarchies that assign authority and employ divisions of labor. As noted by German sociologist Max Weber a century ago, modern organizations are characterized by written policies and formal procedures (Fry & Raadschelders, 2013).

Organizations exist to accomplish goals and missions. For example, private, for-profit companies like Apple exist to design and sell computing devices and earn a profit. Public institutions like the U.S. Library of Congress exist to serve Congress and provide leadership for libraries worldwide. Every organization has different purposes, and these can change over time, but perhaps the best way to identify them is to examine their written policies and procedures. *Mission statements* are documents that set organizational goals through strategic planning. According to John Bryson (2011), a professor of strategic planning at the University of Minnesota, mission statements must answer six questions:

1. Who are we?
2. What basic social and political needs do we exist to meet or what are the most basic social or political problems we exist to address?
3. In general, what do we do to recognize, anticipate, and respond to these problems?
4. How should we respond to our key stakeholders?
5. What are our philosophy, values, and culture?
6. What makes us distinctive or unique (pp. 138-143)?

Bryson's definition applies to public organizations, but regardless of context, mission statements provide guidance to determine if engaging in an activity is logical. These statements are also a type of policy that defines an organization's purpose.

Finally, since most organizations employ divisions of labor, the question arises as to how departments can coordinate work with each other effectively. The answer to this question lies in the idea of *organizational alignment*. Organizational alignment occurs when departments inside organizations write mission statements and direct activity to support the needs of parent organizations. Indeed, there is agreement in library management literature that the missions of departments like university libraries should align with parent organizations (Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2004). As we show below, the literature implies that organizational alignment benefits university libraries, because it ensures libraries complete work that decision-makers value and will reward.

2.1. Organizational Alignment

The concept of organizational alignment received substantial attention from U.S. librarians in the late 2000s, which is reflected in literature pertaining to the creation and communication of library value. Oakleaf (2010) conducted a comprehensive review of literature on behalf of the ACRL that discussed performance metrics and return-on-investment (ROI). Commissioned because of the 2007-09 recession, this review said universities exist to recruit students and enrich their communities (Oakleaf, 2010). Next, this literature review said, "As an important part of higher education institutions, 'libraries do not exist for themselves'; rather they exist to promote institutional missions" (p. 29; Goetsch, 2009; Lynch et al., 2007; Estabrook, 2006). To be successful, academic library managers must both understand the missions of their universities and contribute to them (Bosanquet, 2007). Managers should also actively communicate library achievements to receive a reward (Bosanquet, 2007; McRostie & Robulot, 2009; Estabrook, 2006). Finally, Oakleaf (2010) argues institutional missions in higher education are fluid (Keeling et al., 2008; Fraiser, McClure & Leahy, 2002) so the services libraries provide must evolve as needs change. One example of this is how the University of Minnesota Libraries revised their

mission statement and offered new services to meet university needs a decade ago (Lougee, 2009).

Two articles by Franklin (2009; 2012) explicitly discuss alignment and the benefits to universities and libraries. In the first article, Franklin (2009) presents a case study of the University of Connecticut (UConn) Libraries. To highlight the value of UConn's libraries, staff reorganized the library system to align with the university's academic plan. The result was an improvement in efficiency and service quality (Franklin, 2012). In the second article, Franklin revisited UConn's alignment initiative and differentiated between two "types" of alignment. The first approach entails changing goals, or mission statements, to align with campus goals and initiatives. The second approach completely reorganizes the structure of a library to ensure its functions and sub-units map to the university rather than library needs alone.

2.2. Fiscal Challenges

University library administrators are often concerned about funding. When analyzing the library expenditures of 40 major U.S. higher education institutions, the Association of Research Libraries (2013) (ARL) found library expenditures made up 1.8% of university spending in 2011 compared to 3.7% in 1982. In a world with limited resources, it is understandable why library managers might try to demonstrate the value that their libraries provide, document it in mission statements, and market the work they do to decision-makers.

3. Research Methods

To test whether organizational alignment benefits university libraries, we utilized a mixed-methods research design. During an exploratory research phase, we analyzed library and athletic department expenditures. Our motivation was to explore financial tensions in higher education with a focus on libraries.

The documentary *Schooled: The Price of College Sports* critiques college athletics by saying they exploit student-athletes. The *Washington Post* reports that from 2004 to 2014 there was an "89% increase" in spending on university athletic facilities (Hobson & Rich, 2015). However, most university athletic departments do not support themselves financially; between 2009 and 2014, "public universities pumped […] $10.3 billion" into their programs (Wolverton et al., 2015).

Evidence exists that university athletic programs may increase alumni donations (Meer & Rosen, 2009; Holmes, Meditz, & Sommers, 2008), although in the literature, this finding is not generalizable to all institutions (Martinez, et al., 2010). Who benefits from the revenue that athletic departments generate is also subject to debate in the media. Asking this question led us to question if athletic spending comes at libraries' expense. Seeking to learn more, and because ARL libraries are not as well-funded as they once were (ARL, 2013), we chose to compare athletic department and library spending using publicly accessible data. We collected and analyzed this data for five years—the period between 2008

and 2012. We studied the SEC because it is one of five high-profile "power conferences."

During the first phase of our study, we collected and analyzed quantitative data from three online sources. Data pertaining to SEC athletic departments came from the U.S. Department of Education's "Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act" survey (ope.ed.gov/athletics). Data describing university libraries came from the ARL "Investment Index" (www.arlstatistics.org), which measures investment in university libraries (Franklin et al., 2008). We also collected data from universities to fill gaps in our dataset—namely, figures that pertained to enrollment and leadership compensation, but also library data for non-ARL members (Arkansas, Mississippi, and Mississippi State).

Statistical data pertained to a variety of topics, but it mostly had to do with organizational size. These figures were: athletic department revenue and expenditures; fall enrollment; library salaries; average full-time equivalent (FTE) library salaries; annual library materials expenditures; total library staff; and library dean and football coach salaries.

While examining our data, we found notable differences between athletic departments and libraries, which we discuss in section 4.1. These differences suggested athletic departments were a boon to SEC universities financially and did not hurt libraries. In response, we began collecting and examining mission statements to find if athletic departments and libraries were awarded funding on the basis of whether their activities aligned with university goals.

In the second phase of our study, we collected (and analyzed) mission statements to find if SEC libraries were in better alignment with their parent universities than athletic departments. In our analysis, university mission statements acted as a control. We collected 41 (of 42) mission statements representing 97.6% of our study population. The University of Kentucky athletic department did not have a mission statement available.

The mission statements we examined were a variety of ages and lengths, but they were the most current versions available. One limitation of our data that was that we first collected statements that were current as of 2014 and not necessarily from 2008-2012. This was offset by mission statement age, though, and according to a study by Nous (2015), most ARL library mission statements are about three years old. This indicates the average statements we examined described the time period we studied.

After collecting mission statements, we read and analyzed them using a grounded theoretical approach (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Stemler, 2001). Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to gain insight into a topic from many angles (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Coding with grounded theory involves three different phases: *open*, *axial*, and *selective*

coding. When we open coded mission statements, we created 100 sub-codes. Next, after "packing" and "unpacking" these codes, we created six selective codes describing mission statement content:

1. Benefits;
2. Service;
3. Stakeholders;
4. Teaching and Research;
5. Values; and
6. Other.

After we created our selective codes, we copied and pasted mission statements in three text files and added them to Dedoose. Dedoose is online qualitative analysis software. We applied core codes to passages of mission statement text based on a process of consensus-building. We applied up to five codes to textual passages at the concept-level. We finished coding with 896 code applications and 474 textual excerpts derived from the SEC mission statements.

Last of all, to provide another measure of organizational alignment, we tabulated word frequency counts from mission statements. To do this, we loaded individual plain-text files for athletic departments, libraries, and universities in the TextStat 2.9c software. We sorted word counts in Excel. Next, we merged words and frequency counts when a conceptual relationship existed. To ensure that our coding was accurate, we discussed and merged comparable concepts. We deleted articles, numbers, and words that did not communicate information about organizational missions. After cleaning word lists, we sorted them. To conclude, we chose to examine words in mission statements with a count of greater than or equal to ten. Finally, we compared the remaining top ten words to measure alignment between the three groups we examined.

4. Findings

This section presents our study findings in the order we collected them. First, we describe the quantitative data we collected. This data showed that athletic departments grew faster than libraries. Second, we discuss our analysis of mission statements, which shows library missions aligned with their parent universities more closely than SEC athletic departments.

4.1. Quantitative

In the data we examined, library and athletic department spending increased every year between 2008 and 2012, with the exception of 2011 (for libraries). However, during this period, athletic expenditures grew at a rate *four times faster than for libraries*. Library spending grew an average of $1.373 million per year (or 6.6%), which kept pace with inflation (BLS, 2017). Athletic expenditures grew $17.953 million (or 25.6%) during the same period. This shows athletic departments grew overall, but libraries did not.

Another data point showing SEC libraries did not grow is despite a small increase in total expenditures, there was a marked decrease in the number of professional and support staff that libraries employed. From 2008 to 2010, libraries cut their average number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff by 10. Simultaneously, library material expenditures grew from $10 million to over $11 million, which offset the savings libraries received by cutting staff.

SEC universities and their athletic departments grew rapidly. Athletic revenue increased 26.7% from 2008 to 2012. This growth exceeded spending by roughly 1.1%, which means on average SEC athletic departments were outliers compared to most other U.S. universities—SEC athletics took in more than they spent. Topline athletic revenue growth also shows athletic spending did not harm libraries, because athletic departments raised money for universities. Library revenue data was not available to us, and we assume that the amount raised was minimal given their role as research and teaching support units. Average enrollment at SEC universities grew during the period we studied from 27,746 to 30,326. Because enrollment grew 9%, but library budgets did not, this indicates libraries served more students with no corresponding increase in resources.

Finally, we found major differences between athletic departments and libraries in their staff salaries. In 2012, the Head Football Coach at the University of Alabama earned $9.2 million, while the Dean of Libraries earned $190,000. This gap was found at other schools. It was common to see more money spent on a Head Football Coach salary than all library staff combined in the data we reviewed. Other salary differences also revealed a disparity in terms of the resources available to each organizational unit. In 2012, for instance, Assistant Coaches at SEC universities earned an average of $103,910, but the average library employee salary was only $29,097.

4.2. Qualitative

When we analyzed mission statements that we collected, we found SEC libraries aligned more closely with their parent universities than athletic departments. We found this by examining code frequency counts and the most common words in all three types of mission statements.

We applied core codes that described mission statements 896 times to 474 different textual excerpts. We applied these codes 322 times to university mission statements, 287 to athletic departments, and 287 to libraries. Of the six codes we used to describe mission statements, *values* (n=211) was our most common one. *Service* (n=184) was the next most common code, and it described the services that libraries, athletic departments, and universities provided to stakeholders. Our third most common code was *teaching and research* (n=177). *Benefits* (n=162) was our fourth most common code, and it described the value of the services universities and their departments provided. *Stakeholders* (n=124) was our fifth most frequent code. Our least used code was *other* (n=38),

and it applied to text that other codes did not describe—for example, many universities emphasized their legacy as land grant institutions serving the people of American states.

As we show in *Figure 1*, athletic department and university missions were closest in terms of how often their statements mentioned benefits, stakeholders, and values as priority areas. Libraries and universities were the closest when discussing service, teaching and research, and other relevant topics. Most of the university mission statements we examined focused heavily on teaching and research, which was not something that athletic departments emphasized. Louisiana State University's (LSU) mission statement illustrates[1] this point:

> As the Flagship institution of the state, the vision of Louisiana State University is to be a leading research-extensive university, challenging undergraduate and graduate students to achieve the highest levels of intellectual and personal development. Designated as a Land, Sea, and Space Grant institution, the mission of Louisiana State University is the generation, preservation, dissemination, and application of knowledge and cultivation of the arts.

Indeed, the primary focus of LSU statement is on "intellectual and personal development" and "the generation, preservation, dissemination, and application of knowledge and cultivation of the arts." We coded these statements in LSU's mission as references made to *teaching and research.* Other mission statements were comparable to LSUs. Because teaching and research was a code that described a stand-alone goal, the fact libraries were most closely aligned in this area indicates they were central to the missions of SEC universities in a way that athletic departments were not.

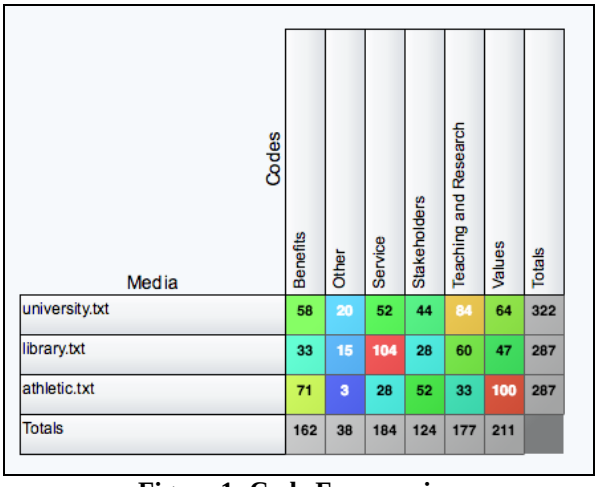

Figure 1: Code Frequencies.

[1] We shortened this mission statement to save space in this paper.

Text coded as related to benefits and values also makes it questionable if athletic departments aligned with universities as closely as libraries. The code for *benefits* described something athletic departments seemed to do a better job of discussing and providing than libraries. SEC athletic programs raise money for universities thus supporting university growth. However, most of the references in the mission statements we read were benefits to student-athletes and not universities, reinforcing our finding that libraries were the most closely aligned type of department we examined.

Last of all, when we examined the most frequent words in mission statements, we found that library missions aligned with universities most closely again. *Table 1* lists common words by department type. Words did not typically apply across the departments we examined, and one example is how "access" came up 32 times in library statements, but it was not included in the top words for other departments. However, for both library and university statements, one of the three most common words was "research." Library and university mission statements were dominated by words like "teaching" and "learning," and we interpret this to mean library and university missions were closely aligned. Athletic and university statements shared words like "students" and "programs," but these words were comparatively infrequent.

University	**#**	**Library**	**#**	**Athletics**	**#**
research	49	university	62	university	65
state	39	service	47	student-athletes	35
programs	35	research	37	students	32
students	35	information	35	excellence	24
education	28	access	32	academics	22
knowledge	24	collections	28	programs	22
public	24	users	28	integrity	21
service	23	technology	18	athletes	21
excellence	19	learning	16	values	18
teaching	18	teaching	16	champions	16

Table 1. Top-10 Words by Frequency Count.

5. Discussion

Contrary to what theory suggests, the athletic departments that we examined grew faster than libraries. The library literature suggests when libraries align with their parent universities they will be rewarded. Franklin (2009, 2012) presents alignment as an effective revenue-generating strategy for libraries. Oakleaf (2010) focused on the value that libraries provide to universities. Other literature supports the argument that libraries should align the services they deliver with universities (Goetsch, 2009; Lynch et al., 2007; Estabrook, 2006; Velasquez, 2013; Bosanquet, 2007; McRostie & Robulot, 2009), but our work shows doing this will not necessarily guarantee increases in funding.

There are four explanations for why organizational alignment did not benefit SEC libraries in dollars and cents:

1. The mission statements we examined did not reflect organizational realities.
2. Universities compete for students and tuition meaning that athletics provided a way to recruit students and raise money.
3. SEC libraries need to communicate their value to stakeholders and decision-makers better.
4. Not all contributions to university missions are equally valued by decision-makers.

Below, we discuss these explanations, and then we present some implications for academic libraries.

One explanation for why SEC libraries did not experience faster growth is that the mission statements we examined did not match reality. The statements we examined fit our study period, but we could not always determine when they were written or updated. Our dataset may not have reflected the goals of SEC member universities in real-time, and there is no requirement that universities update mission statements regularly.

A second explanation is universities in the U.S. increasingly compete for students and tuition dollars. Yet, students do not select schools based entirely on education. Prior et al. (2012) report that although academic reputation is the primary reason students chose a school, their long-term job prospects, tuition costs, social activities, and other factors shape decision-making. Among the reasons Oakleaf (2010) notes why universities exist is to recruit and retain students. The high profile of SEC athletics and the social environment they create likely represented a competitive advantage, so schools responded accordingly. Publicly admitting this, however, would have conflicted with an idealized notion of universities as educational institutions, so we suspect universities and athletic departments made decisions to overlook this tension in their statements (Lemons, 2014).

A third explanation for why SEC athletic departments grew, but libraries did not, is university libraries did not communicate their value effectively. To procure and solicit funding, Bosanquet (2007), McRostie and Robulot (2009), and Estabrook (2006) argue libraries must communicate how they deliver value to decision-makers. Libraries in our study accomplished this in mission statements, but these statements were policy and positioning documents. We did not uncover evidence that libraries failed to communicate the value they delivered, but it is relatively clear their athletic counterparts did so in a spectacular way; SEC athletics received national television coverage and sponsored events that were attended by thousands of people. According to Low (2014), in 2013, the average SEC football game had 74,636 attendees. The SEC

also sponsors the SECU Initiative (n.d.), which "supports and promotes collaborative higher education programs and activities at its fourteen-member universities" (para. 1). From this perspective, the disparities in funding we found may have been the result of libraries inability to communicate the value they provide on a similar scale.

Finally, a fourth explanation for why athletic departments were better funded than libraries is that SEC university leaders did not see libraries as delivering the same value to universities as athletic departments. Our findings show library missions aligned closely with universities. However, not all contributions to universities were identical, and faced with budget issues it is possible that university leaders valued athletic media coverage, revenue, licensing fees, and the benefits of operating an athletic department more than the academic support provided by libraries. We did not find evidence supporting this claim, but alignment does not mean that all departments contribute to an organization in the same way.

How should library managers and administrators interpret each of these four explanations? As we noted earlier, the main implication appears to be that organizational alignment is not always a practical fundraising strategy.

In our study, we uncovered evidence that the purpose of athletic departments, libraries, and universities in their mission statements may have been different than their stated ones. In an environment where students attend universities for reasons other than academics, it makes sense for some athletic departments to grow faster than libraries. This means library directors ought to acknowledge the services they provide may not always be valued.

If libraries attempt to align with universities in pursuit of a reward, we did not find evidence questioning the claim that effective communication is needed. The mission statements we examined were insufficient for libraries to procure more funding, but they were not intended for this purpose. As such, we conclude that a key part of effective organizational alignment entails aggressive marketing and stakeholder outreach.

Strategies for communicating value vary, but the library literature provides many suggestions. One example includes embedding librarians in campus departments (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009) to make the work of librarians obvious. Communications audits can also help university libraries to find how stakeholders see the library servicescape (Oakleaf, 2017). Collecting metrics may also be helpful. The LibQUAL+ survey protocol that originated at Texas A&M University is one performance measurement tool (Cook, 2002; Thompson, n.d.) managers can employ to gather data and communicate about performance. Documenting and communicating the valued services libraries provide cannot guarantee a library will obtain additional funding but doing so is likely necessary.

Our findings do not mean that the portrayal of organizational alignment presented by Franklin (2009; 2012) and Oakleaf (2010) is incorrect. However, library managers and staff need to manage expectations about the benefits of alignment efforts. Choosing to engage in an alignment initiative may not be the only strategy for libraries to increase funding, and thus, before embarking on any initiative to align the delivery of services more closely with a university, we argue that library administrators ought to recognize that the purpose of alignment is not to procure funding. Rather, as noted by Bergeron, Raymond, and Rivard (2004), the purpose of alignment is to improve agency performance, so we believe academic libraries should consider using other fundraising strategies more often.

What do alternative library fundraising strategies include? One option comes from Duke University. Currently, Duke University's libraries (2011) receive a portion of all athletic ticket sales. At the University of Arizona (n.d.), a portion of a student fee is directed to the university library system. At other universities, libraries receive donations in the form of cash, art, and rare books. We do not have recommendations for the best alternative strategies for university libraries to raise funding, but this study suggests the topic is worth investigating.

6. Conclusion

This study of university, athletic, and library mission statements provides lessons for academic libraries, but it has limitations. First, we only looked at mission statements in one athletic conference in the U.S. and we did not compare libraries to other types departments. For this reason, we argue future research ought to examine organizational alignment across a range of departments where the effect might be more easily found. Additionally, future studies might examine data from other financial expenditures and mission statements.

Libraries will always need to raise money. To accomplish this, libraries choosing to align with their parent universities may be a useful strategy. However, as we demonstrated, organizational alignment initiatives may not guarantee benefits to libraries. Based on our analysis of SEC universities, from 2008 to 2012 libraries did not grow but athletic departments thrived despite libraries being better aligned with universities. In our findings, this was most obvious in the alignment we found between libraries and universities with our code for *teaching and research*.

The four explanations for our findings suggest academic libraries should stay open to alternative revenue generating strategies. Future work may show that alignment is an effective strategy for increasing library revenue, but in the meantime, library managers and administrators should manage expectations before embarking on an alignment initiative in pursuit of an award.

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